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## SOME FUNDAMENTAL MISCONCEPTIONS CONCERNING SOUTH AMERICA

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The awakening interest in South American affairs has served to make prominent the confusion of the public mind on certain fundamental questions relating to the present situation and the probable future of political and social institutions in this quarter of the globe. This confusion is due, in large part, to the widely divergent opinions of writers on South America. At first this conflict of views was received with a certain amused indifference, it being assumed that this unknown land, so rich in adventure, was rapidly becoming the theatre of the modern romantic novel, displacing to a certain extent the battlements and towers of mediæval Europe. During the last few years, however, the attitude of the public toward South America has undergone a profound change. We are no longer satisfied with the swashbuckler descriptions of revolutions and other armed conflicts but are demanding unvarnished statements of the actual situation. There is a real national interest that this demand be satisfied, for it is evident that the time is rapidly approaching, if indeed it is not already at hand, when the people of the United States must be prepared to express themselves clearly and unequivocally on certain fundamental questions affecting their relation with the peoples of Latin America.

We must, first of all, abandon all hope of studying South America *en bloc*. There are, of course, certain common traits due to community of racial origin, social tradition and political antecedents. But as soon as we get beyond these fundamental traits it becomes necessary to distinguish carefully between the conditions of economic and social growth through which each of these republics has passed. Each country developed under economic and social conditions peculiar to itself. Today the countries of South America when compared with one another present differences quite as marked as those which dis-

tinguish the countries of Europe from one another. In Brazil we find a federal republic, loosely knit together, but with an administrative organization sufficiently developed to assure stability and security of person and property. The Argentine offers the spectacle of an organized democracy, which has passed through a peaceable social revolution and in which the political system is gradually adapting itself to the new social conditions. Chile is still in many respects a political aristocracy, which is entering upon the first stages of a social revolution through the gradual awakening of the laboring classes to consciousness of power.

In order to understand these countries we must begin with a study of social organization. The first and most serious mistake into which we have fallen has been in judging their national life by the play of party politics. The constant shifting of governmental policy, due to the ephemeral character of party combinations, has created an impression of instability which a more careful analysis of the situation fails to justify. In all the countries of South America there exists a wide gap between the political life of the nation on the one hand, and its economic, industrial, and social activities on the other.

It would be difficult to imagine a more rapid shifting of governmental policy than is taking place in Chile. Under the parliamentary system, for the maintenance of which the civil war of 1891 was fought, the ministries succeed one another with almost bewildering rapidity. It was even rumored in Santiago that the German government had instructed its diplomatic representative not to report cabinet changes until the new ministry had been in office at least one week. And yet this instability of political life affects the life of the nation to a very limited degree. The great mass of the business community look upon politics as the game of a small group of professionals, a necessary evil, tolerable so long as it does not become too serious an obstacle to progress. Politics is looked upon as a career, which one must either enter as a profession or remain entirely aloof. The idea of civic effort with no end in view other than the public welfare is gradually breaking ground but it has as yet exerted but little influence upon political life. In Chile, as in the Argentine and Brazil, a small group of young men are beginning to sound a new note—that of the civic obligation of every citizen—an idea new to the political life of South America.

It is important in interpreting South American conditions to distinguish between two forms of political instability. There is, on the one hand, the type of political instability which finds expres-

sion in perpetual revolution, constituting a constant menace to life and property and an insuperable obstacle to industrial progress. We need not go far to find classic instances. The long series of revolutions in some of the Central American states is fresh in the mind of every student of Latin-American history.

There is, on the other hand, a form of political instability which expresses itself in a constant shifting of political power between different parties or combinations of parties, but which does not affect the fundamental basis of social order. This is the form of instability which exists in Chile and to a certain extent in the Argentine Republic. Ministries succeed one another every few months but the industrial and social life of the nation follows its normal course unaffected by these changes. It is largely through the confusion of these two types of political instability that we are led to misinterpret the actual situation in the more advanced countries of South America. In spite of all the disadvantages of political instability a careful study of other phases of national life in South America leads one to the conclusion that there exist in the social and economic constitution of these countries elements of stability which far outweigh in importance the apparent instability of political conditions and which offer the best guaranties for the maintenance of order and protection to person and property.

There is probably no other section of the world in which the family organization rests on so solid a basis. It is true that the unmarried woman enjoys relatively little freedom in these countries, and it is equally true that the legal rights of the married women are far more restricted than in the United States. The social status of the unmarried and the limited legal rights of the married woman are apt to mislead the foreigner unless he undertakes a careful study of the family itself. He will there find a strength of organization and a solidity of structure which cannot be found either in the United States or in any European country. The unity of family feeling extends not only through the direct line of descent but to all the collateral branches. It is within this large family group that the spirit of coöperation finds its most distinct expression, and it is this spirit of mutual helpfulness within the family group which lends stability to the social organization of the South American countries. Divorce is unknown in the South American codes, but even were it recognized it would be most sparingly used. The public opinion of these countries is so unalterably opposed to the dissolution of the marriage tie that social ostrac-

cism would confront those who attempted to avail themselves of this remedy.

It must not be supposed, furthermore, that the legal subordination of the wife means either the elimination or diminution of her influence. Throughout South America the rearing and education of the children are left to the mother to a far greater extent than in Europe or in the United States. In marked contrast with conditions in the United States there is a lack of companionship between father and children. This gives to the mother a predominant influence in the internal affairs of the family. In fact on her judgment depend the education of the children and to a very large degree the callings which they are to follow.

Another error into which we are apt to fall in our interpretation of South American conditions is in taking the violent play of party politics as an indication of the absence of real patriotism. Because political differences are largely personal differences there is a general tendency on the part of foreign observers to sum up the situation with the remark so often quoted, "No one cares for anything but his personal interests."

The fundamental error of this interpretation consists in making universal the point of view of a comparatively small group of politicians. Throughout South America the mass of the people are as devoted to their respective countries as in any portion of Europe. They are as conscious of the sacrifices that have been made to secure their present position of independence and are as determined to allow no outside interference with the normal development of their native or adopted land. It is this fact which makes so objectionable the theories of European and American scientists as to the desirability of "placing turbulent South America under the domination of races who have demonstrated their aptitude for self-government." Propositions of this kind are extremely attractive to the northern mind. They are clothed in scientific language and have all the appearance of careful scientific deduction. The real reason for their widespread acceptance, however, is to be found in the fact that they flatter that complacent sense of national and racial superiority which is so deeply imbedded in the American mind and which is largely responsible for the feeling of distrust which still exists in certain sections of Latin America.

The history of South America abounds with deeds of heroism and self-sacrifice, the memory of which has been a constant spur to national

pride and patriotism. To think that these countries have little regard for their past or for their future is fundamentally to misconstrue the temper of the people. The strength of national feeling and the consciousness of national purpose are becoming more definitely marked with each decade. The invitation to attend the second peace conference at The Hague was but the formal recognition of an accomplished fact—the establishment of a group of sovereign and independent states in the southern hemisphere, whose political importance could no longer be ignored. We, in the United States, are but beginning to realize that these nations are no longer the object of our condescending sympathy. For the most part, they are full-fledged states, ready to assume their share of the world's work and destined to exert a powerful influence upon world politics. To our government their coöperation and support will be invaluable in raising the plane of international relations and in maintaining the higher interests of international peace. This phase of the situation we have hitherto ignored, taking it for granted that while we might be of service to the countries of South America we could not expect anything in the nature of a counter-service.

To this series of misrepresentations of South American conditions we may add the opinion so generally expressed by all writers, that individual initiative and enterprise are totally lacking; the government being expected not only to perform its usual functions but also to assist individuals in undertakings of a purely private character. It is true that this tendency, inherited from Spain, strongly impresses the foreign observer and it requires some time to detect the changes that are taking place. Upon the younger generation, the example of the United States is exerting a marked influence. In Brazil, in the Argentine, and especially in Chile, the influence of the new spirit is most marked not only in commercial life but also in civic and philanthropic effort. The improvement of the educational system, the closer commercial and intellectual contact with the United States and the example of the large foreign element in their midst, have all contributed toward fostering the new movement. Unless the signs of the time are fundamentally misleading we may confidently look forward to the gradual disappearance of the old Spanish tradition of paternalism and to the inauguration of a period of individual initiative and enterprise which will set at rest all doubts as to the capacity of the people of Latin America to avail themselves of the rich and varied resources with which this section of the American continent has been endowed.

The views of the people of the United States with reference to South America have been formed in part from newspaper reports, which have until recently been devoted almost exclusively to the details of revolutionary movements, and in part from the highly colored accounts of writers in search of adventure or fascinated by the picturesque. We are now entering upon the transition from fiction or half-truth to reality, a change which will not only give us a clearer appreciation of South American conditions but will also pave the way for a closer understanding between the republics of this continent.